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# A NEW LAW OF HEALTH.

BY ELIZABETH BISLAND.

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To say that the Sphere of Wisdom is not a globe sounds like a contradiction in terms, but the accuracy of the paradox is demonstrable. If in setting out toward a fixed goal of truth, one's face be turned in the wrong direction, no persistency in endeavor and no length of travel will ever conduct the wayfarer to the haven where he would be.

This fact in moral geography is, however, one that has been late of discovery and is still far from unanimous acceptance. Perhaps certain inherent weaknesses of human nature will forever preclude its universal reception. Chronic childishness is so common a failing that it would be useless to hope for the adoption of any new truths, were it not that the adult intelligence of the few eventually and inevitably imposes its conclusions upon the multitude. The few are continually dragging the many into the path of fact and common sense, and the immature-minded many are as persistently lusting after a miracle and kicking against the pricks of plain truth. They forever recoil from the steady, dull plodding that lies between them and their ends if they seek them by that path, and turn again longingly to supernaturalism for a charm to conjure away the barriers fencing them out of the Eden of their desires—for a spell to break the chains binding them bondslaves of space and time, of heat and cold, of poverty, pain and disease.

They fashion for themselves dreams of flying carpets, of magic lamps and rings; of transmutable metals, of fountains of youth and elixirs of life, which are to achieve their purposes without effort or drudgery. Bullied and shamed out of these puerile inventions, they substitute legends of fasts and macerations whose

courage and asceticism are to make the gods tremble with respectful admiration, whose triumphs over material passions are to give occult freedom from material limitations. Buddhs and Mahatmas are imagined, who stand moveless and speechless till the birds nest and rear broods in their hair, and who thereby grow so mighty that the mountains rock beneath the weight of their thoughts, not to mention their acquirement of powers which render the services of the post office unnecessary and make railways ridiculously superfluous.

Splendid energies, passionate faith and ardour, master intellects have been wasted in this long fruitless endeavour to find some magic by which nature is to be conquered and man made master of circumstance, without drudgery—all thrown into that bottomless pit of error which can never be filled.

Even now that it has been demonstrated beyond cavil that nature is to be conquered by her own natural means only, and only in accordance with her own natural laws, there are still a lamentable number of descendants of Lot's wife, continually casting longing glances back to the Sodom of their intellectual sins. It is nothing to them that, having once faced about in the right direction, the same amount of effort properly directed has achieved exactly the marvels after which the supernaturalists vainly sought—that, eating our due amount of food and attaching no mystical significance to anything, we have torn our way through mountains, flashed our thoughts under the oceans, sailed straight into the teeth of the winds, annihilated distance with steam, learned to look at our own bones through our solid flesh, to bottle up dead voices as one might preserve cherries, and reproduce for our own amusement upon a screen the life of yesterday exactly as it passed before our eyes, even to its minutest movement or play of expression. These are the marvels which have rewarded those content to tread by slow steps the plain, straight road of dull facts, and perhaps the most dazzling and surprising discoveries that lie along this Path of the Tortoise have been those affecting human life and health—discoveries to which the harebrained are still seeking the ever elusive short cut.

There was once a little girl who, after the manner of her sex, feared greatly all and sundry of certain fierce beasts, such as mice, bats, bumblebees, spiders, and, more vividly and especially, dogs.

On a day, having been bidden to deliver a message to an op-

posite neighbor, she set out radiating the pleasing results of soap, brushes and a fresh pinafore, but was brought to a sudden pause by a specimen of the worst of enemies—which seemed to the perspective of an eye only three feet from the ground to be easily the rival of an elephant in size—lying prone across the path, lolling an intimidating tongue and rolling an eye which, though outwardly calm, might be guessed to conceal a horrid intent. Immediately there was a swish of starched skirts, a twinkle of bare ankles, and an appeal was preferred to that infallible power and knowledge which Providence has so beneficently placed in maternal hands. This particular parent, being a person of nimble imagination, realized that a mastiff as large in proportion to her own inches as was this one to the normal height of five years, might daunt even her adult courage, and she forebore to remonstrate or reason.

“There,” she said placidly, “is a lump of sugar. Put it on your tongue and hold it there. Of course, the dog will not touch you while you have a lump of sugar on your tongue”—and, so fortified, Five Years set forth with a conviction of immunity which carried her successfully past the source of terror.

The incident is in itself, perhaps, not of historic importance, but it is a particularly vivid example of the complete divorce existing in the undeveloped mind between the laws of cause and effect; and in no department of human thought has that divorce continued so long and so entire as in all that relates to human health.

Every one of us can revive from childhood a memory of the soothing balm which overspread the injured temple, when a sympathetic nurse bestowed the richly deserved spanking upon the offending chair corner that had caused the pain, or applied the clearly indicated plaster of a kiss; and medicine long followed these intelligent suggestions from the nursery and administered, to the bitten, hairs from the biting dog. Medicine as a science has, of course, shared in the general growth of knowledge, but the bulk of mankind still continues to put sugar on its tongue as a protection from wild beasts; to castigate the chair corners, and apply remedies as unknown to the pharmacopœia as the feminine kiss. Perhaps the stolen potato carried in the pocket, or the bit of red flannel bound about the left wrist, is a less trusted remedy for rheumatism than it was fifty years ago, and the dried heart

of a mouse in a bag about the neck has lost some of its potency against epileptic seizures; but the rise and popularity of innumerable systems and cures that have no reasonable relation to the ills they affect to assuage prove that the laws of health are still as heterogeneous from the intelligence of the mass as the laws of the differential calculus. It would be diverting, were it not so pathetic, to see the constant endeavor on the part of the multitude to lift itself up by its own hygienic bootstraps in the form of barefoot cures, all-wool cures, mind cures, cures by clairvoyance, by Christian Science, by electricity, and by bone manipulation. Like children we still move about in worlds unrealized, seeing no reason why some power that wishes us individually well should not break through the immutable sequence of cause and effect on our behalf, and release us from the unpleasant results of our own foolishness. Our childish "let's pretend" sweeps away for the moment the tiresome persistency of facts, and opens the gate of a world where one may eat one's cake and have it, too, and after dancing escape the bill for the fiddling.

It is, of course, only by a figure of speech that the laws of health can be called new, all natural laws being of their very nature eternal. What is new is the realization that there are *laws* governing health—that suffering is not a haphazard chance, or the visitation of some capricious punishment by a higher power, but the orderly sequence and expected result of some infringement of the physical laws of being. We have long been aware that if we ate or drank certain poisonous substances the result would be pain or death, and we do not even hope to evade by prayer or faith the swift and certain results of a dose of prussic acid. We have been quite convinced by ocular demonstration that, if we walked over the edge of a cliff, faith would not interfere with the laws of gravitation, and that, when we reached the earth below, the results were certain to be uncomfortable, if not mortal. The more civilized communities have become entirely convinced that public filth and the use of impure water are absolutely certain to breed disease, and take their measures accordingly, having abandoned confidence in processions and vows to erect churches; but what still waits for general acceptance is the truth that all disease and suffering arise from perfectly preventable causes. We continue to use poisons which are quite as certain, if less rapid, than those bearing the warning skull and crossbones on their

labels, and we continue to walk over hygienic precipices, full of hope that the results will not be disagreeable. To take the commonest example of this inconsequent behavior: Every one is aware that oxygen is necessary for life, is also aware that an adult exhausts the oxygen from three cubic feet of air with every breath he draws, and that two minutes breathing of impure air will appreciably affect for evil every one of his organs and every corpuscle of his blood; and yet nine persons out of ten sleep for eight hours out of the twenty-four in an unchanged atmosphere, and wake to wonder at the unpleasant results, perhaps to call in some conjuror to charm them away.

There is, it is true, as great an inequality in the inheritance of health as in the heirship of wealth or brains. Some are born with a fortune of vigor and soundness so large that not a lifetime of eager squandering will leave them poor, and others enter the world paupers of need so dire that no charity from medicine can ever raise them to comfort; but most of us have just that mediocre legacy of vitality which renders us undistinguishable units in the mass. It lies in the hands of each to improve or waste that property as he chooses, for there are self-made men physically as well as financially; those who, because of ancestral wastefulness, have only a sixpence of health, and turn it into a fortune; and there are spendthrifts of health who come to as sorrowful case as spendthrifts of gold. The body is a realm where a wise and frugal ruler brings happiness as surely as a foolish one insures distress, and wisdom here, as elsewhere, lies in learning and obeying natural laws. It is just those natural laws—simple, severe, immutable—which must be obeyed all day and every day, against which we chafe, for which some magic pill or potion is offered as a substitute. Temperance, cleanliness, activity are the three virtues of the body, as faith, hope and charity are of the soul. As tithes of mint, anise and cummin are easier to render than to practice the law, justice and judgment, so the easy sacrifice of burnt offerings of drugs is offered to the goddess Hygeia in lieu of constant obedience to her regimen. Forty days of Lenten abstention are considered adequate atonement for a year of the sins of the flesh, and a brief retreat to a “cure” of mineral waters (where the high priests of health are bribed by passing confession and submission) is considered a penance which should obliterate all past offenses. As it is easier to repeat formu-

las of prayer than to persistently keep oneself unspotted from the world, so it is easier for fat old sinners to paddle about barefooted in the dew than to permanently abandon their little darling sins of greediness, indolence or self-neglect. To a constant cry of "Lo, here! and Lo, there!" the world runs to sit under the blue glass, or to swathe itself in wool in the ever renewed hope that some substitute may be found for unfailing observance of the three rules.

An obscure but witty romance, whose vivacity attracted less attention than it deserved, told of an undiscovered country in the heart of the Andes where crime was looked upon as the unfortunate result of congenital temperament—a disease demanding sympathy and treatment; but ill health aroused only reprobation as a wilful offence against wise and well understood laws. A bronchial case resulted in arrest and imprisonment, and friends of the family considered it untactful to cough in the presence of the criminal's relations, but a severe attack of embezzlement aroused widespread sympathy, and cards were left upon the invalid with kind inquiries as to whether he was receiving the best moral attention. A condition of affairs which would be less whimsical than might at first sight appear!

Paracelsus—accused of wizardry because of the simple natural means by which he effected his cures—believed that, if he were allowed absolutely to direct from its birth the diet of a fairly healthy infant, he could build up a constitution which might be made to last out a century in undiminished vigor, and there are those prepared to accept literally the stories of the age of the antediluvian patriarchs because of their theory that, bread not being at that time in use, digestions never called upon to deal with starch could easily sustain life to Methuselah's term.

Because of the long neglect and ignorance of the true laws of health, the subtle, but supremely important, chemistry of nutrition has been neglected in favor of matters of less moment. The same skill which developed the science of bacteriology and pursued the most elusive microbe to his most secret fastness, might perhaps have been more practically applied. After being found and named, the average microbe remains no less virulent and dangerous, and how much more valuable would have been a knowledge—equally obtainable—of exactly the amount and nature of the food required for the best results of health and growth.

There is in the West Indies a farmer ant who, upon a carefully prepared soil of flowers and leaves, grows a tiny fungus on which he feeds. The eggs, laid by a queen, seem when hatched to produce a uniform type of larvæ; but these, through different feeding, develop, when perfected, either warriors, farmers or queens, as may be needed. If, through accident or the result of battle, the supply of warriors is dangerously lowered, these able pismires transfer some of the larvæ being fed with such food as produces farmers to the nursery for young soldiers, and change of diet changes their natures so radically that the creature which should have developed the peaceful industry suited to agricultural pursuits becomes instead a warlike insect who defends the nest against the assaults of those fierce nomads, the black ants, whose inroads are so dreaded by these laborious communities. Ah! what a triumph of science, could we too know upon what meat should these our Cæsars feed that they might grow so great. What a much more important achievement that would be than the discovery and naming of all the myriads of microbes, who would be impotent to harm the perfectly nourished body.

Medicine, despite all its modern discovery and progress, has done less to spread the reign of common sense and a general comprehension of the laws of health than might have been hoped for. More advance had been possible in this direction had we adopted the logical method of the Chinese, who pay medical bills as long as under the physician's advice they continue in health, and cease payments the moment of attack from disease; arguing lucidly that immunity from pain is a good worth any price, and that suffering implies some incompetence on the part of their advisers. Our reversal of this intelligent system has naturally turned the thoughts of the faculty more toward therapeutics than to the study of preventive medicine. Doctors, after all, are but men with like passions with ourselves, and examples such as that of Paracelsus discourage those who would be wiser than their age. Men do not pay doctors to remind them of their hygienic sins, or insist upon the practice of tiresome rules. They call upon them to give them absolution for their offences, and sell them indulgences in the form of pills which will make renewed infringement of the code possible.

What would become of the practice of a physician who should say to a patient: "You need no drugs. Your ruined nerves are



the result of too rich and too varied a diet, and physical indolence. Take no medicine; walk five miles every morning at six o'clock and live entirely upon gruel and water for a month?" It would be instantly borne in upon the seeker for health that this was an ignorant quack who had failed to understand his case. Naaman, the Syrian, felt the same blank sense of disappointment when he was bid to dip himself three times in the river Jordan, and but for his servant he would have scorned to try so simple a cure. Simple cures are but little more valued in our day than in the era of the stern Jewish prophet, and, since doctors must live by satisfying their patients, they will continue to gratify the desire for something more startling in their prescriptions than plain sense, and refrain from insistence upon unpalatable truths.

The sect who call themselves, in exquisite confusion of ideas, Christian Scientists, and who practice the latest abracadabra to conjure away the effects of fixed causes—asserting that pain is the result of sin and can be abolished by faith—have hold of one of those half truths so confusing to the untrained intelligence. But they childishly overlook the fact that pain, while it is the undoubted result of offences against physical morals, is in itself not an evil, being simply the message sent to the brain over the telephone wires of the nerves to inform it that some member of the body's commonwealth is in danger and requires assistance. That the mind should refuse to act upon the news otherwise than by declining to believe it, appears to be the gist of their system, stated in plain terms.

Not by stopping the ears, not by the practice of any magic, is health to be obtained. By no flying carpets may it be reached. Fasts and prayers will not call it down from heaven. Fixed, immortal, the laws remain, always unchanged, always inexorable. The wages of disobedience are disease. To know the law, to practice it daily—that is the lost path to the Fountain of Youth; that is the long-hid secret of the Elixir of Life.

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